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Book Reviews

The Student's Old Testament. Israel's Laws and Legal Precedents from the Days of Moses to the Closing of the Legal Canon.

By CHARLES FOSTER KENT, Ph.D. With Plans and Diagrams.
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907. Pp. 301. \$2.75 net.

Perhaps the greatest practical result of the critical movement upon the field of Old Testament study has been the discovery of the importance of the prophetic element. This is the center and soul of the Old Testament. Yet the attention which has been devoted to it has had the effect of thrusting the legal books too far into the background, and of giving them less than their due. For two reasons they are important—for their interest in worship and in civic righteousness; and this very careful volume of Professor Kent's ought to do much to revive interest in these too much neglected books of the Old Testament.

The neglect is not hard to understand. As soon as the typological method of interpretation was felt to be ineffective, it then seemed as if those books had nothing to offer but obsolete laws of life and irrelevant regulations of worship. But apart from that, the relative confusion in which the legal parts of the Old Testament have come down to us, more than half excused their neglect. Now all that is changed. The strata of Hebrew law have been sifted and its development traced by many scholars; but here for the first time, all that is made as plain as day for the English reader. Professor Kent has done for the laws what he did many years ago for the Proverbs—gathered together passages which belong together, and which deal with the same or similar themes. In this way he enables us to see at a glance the growth of Hebrew opinion on questions, for example, of marriage, slavery, etc. In this way, too, we can see at a glance the enormous difference between the pre-exilic and the post-exilic conception of the tent of meeting. To the elaborate description of the latter, "in the past more attention has been devoted than it really deserves—often to the neglect of noble ethical laws, which possess a permanent value" (p. 152).

The main body of the book consists of a translation of all the legal literature (including the relevant sections of Ezekiel), conveniently arranged under captions—Personal and Family Laws, Constitutional Laws, Criminal Laws, Humane Laws, Laws Defining Obligations to Jehovah, and Ceremonial Laws; these divisions being further subdivided—the Criminal

Laws, for example, into crimes against Jehovah, against the state, against morality and decency, against the person, against property. Cognate laws are so arranged that their development may be readily traced. The introduction discusses the history of Israel's laws under six heads—their Babylonian background, their origin and growth, the primitive Hebrew codes, the Deuteronomic codes, Ezekiel and the Holiness code, and the priestly codes.

The profound influence of the Code of Hammurabi is acknowledged (cf. p. 24), but it is equally maintained that, speaking generally, the spirit and purpose of Hebrew law have no ancient parallel. Some of the more important conclusions may here be mentioned. The early decalogue in *Exod.*, chap. 34, cannot, as a whole, be earlier than the days of the united kingdom; possibly it was put in written form during the reign of Solomon and in connection with the Jerusalem temple. Against the scholars who maintain that the stones were simply a symbol of primitive worship, Professor Kent believes that they were really inscribed with a decalogue. The great decalogue in *Exod.*, chap. 20, *Deut.*, chap. 5, is assigned, on the strength of its ethical and prophetic spirit, to a period not earlier than the latter part of the eighth century; though the important concession is made that, "with the exception of the second, and possibly the tenth command, there is nothing in it fundamentally inconsistent with the conclusion that it came, in its original and simplest form, from Moses himself."

The original edition of Deuteronomy seems to Professor Kent to have been completed somewhere between the beginning of Josiah's reign in 639 and the great reform in 621 B. C., rather than in Manasseh's reign. But if the book were written in Josiah's reign, it is more difficult to see how it could have disappeared; its disappearance in the persecuting times of Manasseh seems, on the whole, more intelligible and probable. Deuteronomy is regarded as a collection of minor codes. The original draft of the Law of Holiness (*Lev.*, chaps. 17–26) is placed between the first and final captivity (597–586 B. C.). The priestly laws, though they constitute a real unity, come not from one but several hands; and in their composite form they cannot be later than 250 B. C.

Professor Kent draws a careful distinction between the time when a law was in force and the time when it was reduced to writing—the former may have been ages before the latter. He thus acknowledges an abundant amount of very ancient material in Israel's laws, and his conclusions ought to be welcome to those who fear that criticism is robbing the ancient history of its truth and Moses of his glory. "It may truly be said that the later Jewish traditions which aim to emphasize the antiquity of Israel's

laws are not without a large and substantial basis in fact." The roots of the Law of Holiness, for example, "are probably to be traced to the Mosaic and nomadic periods of Israelitish history," and many of the laws "reflect customs as old as the Hebrew race" (pp. 41 f.). Of the laws of Exod., chaps. 20-23, "many of them may come from Moses," and "there was probably a primitive oral decalogue, which came, as the tradition asserts, directly from Moses."

The volume does not profess to be a commentary, yet in the footnotes to the translation there is scattered a large amount of valuable information relative to ancient Hebrew society and every opportunity is taken to illustrate or contrast the Hebrew codes of law with that of Hammurabi. By the aid of this volume, the study of the legal books of the Old Testament is made lucid and interesting; and despite much that is temporary and outgrown, we may yet speak with justice, as Professor Kent does in his Preface, of "the permanent value of the Old Testament legal literature."

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A Short History of the Baptists. By HENRY VEDDER. Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907. Pp. 431. \$1.50.

Sixteen years ago Professor Vedder's *Short History of the Baptists* appeared in a small volume of 245 pages. It at once took the leading place among Baptist general histories. But the edition has long been exhausted. The author has, however, during these years continued a diligent student. His range of information has enlarged; he has even more fully caught the spirit of scientific historical investigation; he has visited most, if not all, the places of chief interest; and had access to all the available sources of information. As professor of church history he has had opportunity to devote his time to the investigation and solution of historical problems. Out of this enriched and enlarged experience he brings a new edition of the short history, more than twice as extensive, for the most part rewritten, containing forty-five illustrations, and done in strict conformity to the rules of scientific historical composition. He accordingly does not find Baptist churches farther back than 1611. But he makes it clear that we do not at all depend for our right to exist upon any theory of historical succession. He believes that the New Testament is our guide. But the great question for us is whether we now have New Testament churches. It matters not in the least whether or no we can